DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 227 477 CS 207 262

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TITLE Reading and Writing: Is There a Connection?
PUB DATE [82]
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; Family Influence; Integrated Activities; *Language Acquisition; Language Experience Approach; *Language Processing; Language Research; Parent Child Relationship; *Reading Instruction; Student Teacher Relationship; Teaching Methods; *Writing Instruction; Writing Research
IDENTIFIERS *Reading Writing Relationship

ABSTRACT

Research indicates that reading and writing should be learned together since both are language processes, and that children should be shown how the skills they have acquired during learning to read apply to learning to write. A language experience approach is useful for accomplishing this. Many aspects of writing point out the integrative relationship between reading and writing, including (1) interest, (2) spelling, (3) punctuation, (4) grammar, and (5) composition. Children should learn to read and write just as they learned how to talk, naturally, without an awareness of the skills being learned. Teachers need to show children that reading and writing do make sense and that there is much more to learning than boring drills and test-oriented activities. Using natural language and experiences in the classroom can motivate writing. Whether a child becomes a good writer depends upon the teacher's role--if the teacher is open and accepting and responds positively to the child's writing, chances are the child will become a good writer who focuses on meaning in the same way that a reader focuses on meaning. (HTH)

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Reading and Writing: Is There a Connection?

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READING AND WRITING: IS THERE A CONNECTION?

A fish without water...a flower without sunshine...a rainbow without color...UNTHINKABLE...you say!

What do you think about the notion of reading without writing? Unfortunately, for the child's sake, you don't respond to this idea in the same way you did to the ideas of a fish without water, a flower without sunshine, or a rainbow without color. Why?

What's so important about the notion of reading and writing being taught together? Should the teacher automatically think about the language strand of the curriculum as including both reading and writing? How are reading and writing alike? Can they be related in the classroom, and if so, how can the connection be made? Does the teacher have to be SUPERTEACHER to survive in a classroom where the focus is on making the connection between reading and writing? What about the learner --- what are the benefits of a curriculum which includes both reading and writing in the language strand?

Donald Graves, who has done extensive research with children and the writing process, expressed many concerns about the state of writing in this country in his article "We Won't Let Them Write." This article was written by Graves (1978) as a result of research done in the United States, England and Scotland.

Graves says:

> Writing is extolled, worried over, cited as a national priority, but seldom practiced. The problem with writing is not poor spelling, punctuation, grammar, and handwriting. The problem with writing is no writing. Reading has been overstressed, often at the expense of writing. Even more serious is our growing insistence that students be solely proficient in receiving information, rather than in sending it. This not only hurts writing, but reading as well (p. 636).

Courtney Cazden (1980) says that "One would expect, simply by definition, that language arts education should include the development of competencies in expressing ideas (productive language) as well as competencies in understanding the ideas of others (receptive language), and in both oral and written modes." She explains, however, that "in actual practice children's time is spent overwhelmingly in listening and reading" (p. 595). Most classroom instruction is spent on something other than writing.

Reading and writing should be learned together since both are language processes, according to Roger Shuy (1982). He says, "It is unfortunate that writing and reading have been separated into different curriculum events" (p. 807). Shuy explains that children should be shown how the skills they have acquired during learning to read apply to learning to write. He believes that the Language-Experience Approach (LEA) is useful for accomplishing this. Marie Clay (1977) also says "The child who learns to read with a language-experience approach to natural language texts, works down through that hierarchy (analytically) as he learns to read his books, and up through that hierarchy (synthetically) as he learns to write stories" (p. 65).

Shuy (1982) also stresses that the teaching of reading and writing should be integrated in a natural way. The learner should come to think of reading and writing as a means of getting things done. He says:

> ...the language strand not only motivates by making language real but also offers insights into what to look for in the reading process, namely, how to comprehend what the writer was trying to say (p. 812).

Clay (1975) also says that a reading and writing program, whose emphasis is on meaning, is necessary in any classroom. She believes:

> In the child's early contact with written language, writing behaviors seem to play the role of organizers of reading behaviors. Writing is not the only means of expressing ideas in written language . . . but it does appear to help the child to come to grips with learning to attend to the significant details of written language (p. 3).

Mauree Applegate (1963) emphasized the value of integrating the reading/writing process when she said, "...writing enriches reading...it tunes the ear to the rhythms in all life..." (p. 12).

The relationship that exists between reading and writing and its effect on both the reader and writer is further explained by Macrorie (1976) when he says:

> A good part of the time he is writing, a writer must sense his reader out there . . . . In a sense a writer becomes his own reader while he writes. He talks to his reader and hears that talk himself. When you acquire that knack, other persons will come along with you. Easy as this habit is to learn, many persons will never learn it. They are like those who try to turn a piece of pottery on the wheel and never create a cup which holds coffee (p. 9).

Macrorie is saying that writers should write like readers while Frank Smith (1982) says "The key to learning about writing from reading is to read like a writer" (p. 179).

Both Smith and Macrorie are stressing the integrative nature of the reading/writing process; implicit to the notions of both Macrorie and Smith is the very important element of <u>meaning</u>.

How does a child learn to "read like a writer?" Smith (1982) says:

> The different aspects of a productive writing environment cannot be separated from each other and delivered to children one bit at a time. Reading, writing, talking about writing, and talking in order to write must be continual possibilities; they overlap and interlock. In theory, reading begins with the teacher reading <u>to</u> children, then <u>with</u> them, and finally with the children reading for themselves. In practice, however, children able to read some texts for themselves will still learn more from other texts that are read to them. Reading alone and being read to can each be a welcome relief from each other. Similarly with writing. It is not the case that the teacher should first write for the child, then with the child, and then leave the child alone. Rather, the matter is one of <u>accessibility</u>; teachers have to develop a sense of when to offer help, when to intervene, and when to stand back (p. 202).

Learning to write like learning to read does not develop in a neat and orderly fashion. According to Smith (1982):

> . . . writing is not learned in steps; there is no ladder of separate and incremental skills to be ascended. Writing develops as an individual develops, in many directions, continually, usually inconspicuously, but occasionally in dramatic and unforeseeable spurts. And, like individual human development, writing requires nourishment and encouragement rather than a restraining regimen (p. 203).

The following statements made by Smith (1982, pp. 203-204) about how teachers can help children develop certain aspects of writing are very important because many point out the integrative relationship between reading and writing.

> Interest is developed by showing enthusiasm, providing demonstrations, by reading to children what they find interesting and by helping them to write what they find interesting.
>
> Sensitivity grows if children assume they can be writers and is destroyed if their expectations are demolished.
>
> Spelling is fostered by providing spellings as they are required (to help the child), recognizing that spelling is primarily learned through reading and can be an obstacle to writing that children should be helped to overcome.
>
> Punctuation is learned through reading and in use, when something a child has written or wants to write is conventionally punctuated. Children will not learn to punctuate if they are unable or afraid to write texts of sufficient complexity for punctuation to make a difference.
>
> Grammar comes partly through "correction"...when there is a desire to say something clearly and partly through sensitivity in reading to written language that a child finds interesting and comprehensible.
>
> Composition is learned in practice, when separated from the constraints of transcription, and stimulated by reading, discussion, and the opportunity for private reflection.
>
> Ideas develop from interaction and dialogue --- with other people...with books, films, and drama, and especially with one's own writing. Ideas grow through exchange.
>
> Fluency comes with increasing speed, confidence and the avoidance of psychological blocks. The best springboard for writing still to come is writing already done.
>
> Neatness comes last, part of a final cleaning up if there is some purpose for it. Consideration of neatness should not slow down composition.

Smith's belief that reading and writing should be learned by children just as they learned to talk, i.e. naturally, without an awareness of the skills being learned may seem as Smith puts it "radical". However, when his recommendations for teaching reading and writing are considered, this belief may not seem so radical after all. Smith (1982) says:

> . . . teachers and children together should use writing (and reading, spoken language, art, and drama) to learn other things. Writing should be used to tell stories and produce artifacts --- books to be published, poems to be recited, songs to be sung, plays to be acted, letters to be delivered, programs to be consulted, newspapers to be distributed, advertisements to be displayed, complaints to be aired, ideas to be shared, worlds to be constructed and explored (p. 211).

Smith emphasizes that teachers need to show children that reading and writing do make sense and that there is much more to learning than boring drills, "busywork and test-oriented activities that are irrelevant for learning to read or write, but cannot be avoided" (p.211).

James Britton (1970) also believes that children should learn to write just as naturally as they learned to talk. Britton says that not only do children learn to write by writing, but they also learn from writing. He believes that children learn from writing when they write about their experiences. It is in the process of interpreting their experiences through the writing process that learning takes place. Britton stresses the importance of using the child's world or experiences when he says:

> . . . everytime a child succeeds in writing about something that has happened to him or something he has been thinking, two things are likely to happen. First he has improved his chances of doing so the next time he tries; in other words, his piece of writing has given him practice. And, secondly, he has interpreted, shaped, coped with, some bit of experience (p. 29).

Ronald Cramer (1978) also talks about using children's natural language and experiences in the classroom to motivate writing. He believes that "No higher gift of literacy can be passed on to our children than the desire

and the ability to write" (p. 2). He also believes that children should have the freedom to write about the world as they see it from their point of view. According to Cramer, a successful writing program is a means of producing "an abundance of useful reading materials written by children" (p. 3).

Hoskisson (1979, p. 894) believes that "Children must be introduced to the written form of the language by being read to." He also says that children need more time for writing in school and stresses that "Writing should be center stage" (p. 895). He maintains that writing will also help children with reading and learning in the content areas.

In a recent review of the current research on writing, Marie Clay (1982, p. 67) asked the question, "How much writing do children do?" Her answer was "Very little." Her next question was, "How do we get children to write more?" In answer to this question, Clay says that we must be more accepting of children's attempts to write. We must respect their approximations as they become writers. Classrooms should be secure and friendly places where the child trusts the teacher to help him develop as a writer.

Clay says, "If we do not set out to convince first graders that writing is difficult, they probably will not arrive at grade 2 convinced of it" (p. 67).

How are reading and writing alike? First of all, Kenneth Goodman (1976) says that reading is language. Writing is also a language process. Reading is receptive, while writing is generative. Secondly, readers are users of language, and they use language to discover the writer's intended meaning. Murray (1968) says that the purpose of writing is to explore and discover meaning. According to Smith (1982) and Murray (1968), a good reader asks himself "Does this make sense?" A good writer also asks "Does this make sense?" The purpose of both reading and writing is to learn by "making sense." Glenda Bissex (1981, p. 788) supports the premise of Smith and Murray when she says that "Good writers have been found to focus first on meaning, while poor

writers, conceiving of good writing as correct writing, focus from the start on correctness and neatness, on avoiding errors." This observation of the poor writer is supported by research done by Sondra Perl (1980) with unskilled writers at the community college level. She believes that the lack of proficiency of the poor writer may be due to their premature corrections since they view good writing as correct writing. This premature correction and editing affects the meaning the writer is trying to convey since the emphasis is not on meaning but on correctness. In other words, the writer isn't "writing like a reader" or "reading like a writer" as emphasized by both Macrorie (1976) and Smith (1982).

Bissex (1981, p. 789) believes that "Children can be taught to be poor writers or good writers." Whether or not the child is a good or poor writer depends upon the role of the teacher. If the teacher is open and accepting and responds openly and positively to the child's writing, chances are s/he will become a good writer who focuses on meaning.

Reading and writing are both language processes where the use of language cue systems must operate in an interdependent manner if meaning is to be found. Carolyn Burke (1976, p. 15) says, "Reading stops when anyone of its three necessary systems --- graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic --- is segregated from the process."

Burke explains that:

> Reading involves an interaction between the language process of the reader and the language process of the author. Readers examine a piece of text on the basis of the control they have of language. They have available to them the context and the organization of their own language systems. Authors write their texts on the basis of their control of language and have available to them the content and organization of their language systems (p. 17).

Finally, Burke says, "The operation of the reading/writing process can be viewed as three dimensional --- with the graphic material and the processes of the language being intersected by the reader/author" (1976, p. 22).

Reading and writing are not exact processes. Children bring their intuitive knowledge and their experiences to the printed page (Goodman 1976; Bissex 1981). Murray (1968, p. 7) also says, "The writer understands writing is a process, not a rigid procedure."

Reading and writing are both processes where children must be active participants. In other words, children learn to read by reading and write by writing. It only makes sense --- do children learn to swim without swimming?

A teacher does not have to be SUPERTEACHER to survive in a classroom where reading and writing are learned together. However, a teacher would be considered a SUPERTEACHER if the following premises about the reading/writing process were evident in the language arts strand of the curriculum in his/her classroom. These premises are:

1. Reading and writing are both language processes which should both be included in the language arts strand.
2. Children will learn to read and write when they are shown how the two processes are related.
3. Children learn to read and write when presented with meaningful experiences from which they can operate.
4. Children need to be "read to" and "talked to" as they learn to read and write; oral language interaction is a most important ingredient in the learning process.
5. The purpose for learning to read and write is to discover and express meaning.
6. Reading and writing are not exact processes. The child needs the opportunity to "try out" his language in learning to read and write.
7. The immersion of the child in language through speaking, listening, reading and writing provides an environment where children can learn "naturally."
8. Reading and writing are both language processes where the language cue systems (syntactic, semantic and graphophonic) must operate interdependently if meaning is to be found.

Finally, the most important role of the SUPERTEACHER should be one of helping the child benefit by learning to "read like a writer" and "write like a reader!"

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